

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-4

WASHINGTON POST
23 November 1983

Weinberger Notes Gains in Strength

By Fred Hiatt
Washington Post Staff Writer

Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger said yesterday that the Reagan administration has made "substantial improvements" in U.S. military strength, but he criticized Congress for dragging its feet on funding the president's full buildup.

Before leaving town last week, Congress approved a record \$250 billion defense budget, about \$11 billion short of the administration's request.

The Pentagon said the budget represents only 3 percent "real" annual growth—after inflation—compared with the 7 percent sought by President Reagan, and Weinberger said congressional refusal to fund the administration's full request will end up costing more.

"We have a situation in which what we need, what's been authorized, what we will have to have, will cost us more and will take us a little longer to acquire," Weinberger told a Pentagon news conference.

The Defense Department budget has more than doubled from fiscal 1979, when it totaled \$121 billion, to the fiscal 1984 budget of slightly less than \$250 billion.

Neither total includes the military construction bill, which this year appropriated more than \$7 billion, or the Energy Department appropria-

tion for nuclear weapons production, more than \$5 billion this year.

"It's not an arms race," Weinberger said. "What we're engaging in is an attempt to regain deterrent strength."

The administration last summer projected a defense budget of \$321.5 billion for fiscal 1985. Weinberger yesterday declined to discuss his hopes for the coming fiscal year, but he left some room for retreat from that total when he noted that inflation rates have been lower than projected.

Navy Secretary John F. Lehman Jr. also held a news conference yesterday to claim cost savings in contracts and spare-parts purchases.

Lehman said the Navy recently awarded \$5.9 billion in contracts, spending money appropriated by Congress just last week, and saved \$480 million compared with earlier Navy budget estimates.

Lehman, who jawboned McDonnell Douglas last year to lower the cost of F/A18 fighter jets, attributed the lower costs to the Pentagon's increased emphasis on competition in procurement.

But he said spare and repair parts continue to be purchased mostly on a "sole-source" basis and to cost more than they should.

To illustrate that point, and demonstrate the Navy's commitment

to solve the problem, Lehman displayed for the cameras a screwdriver for which General Electric has been charging the Navy \$780, and a hood for a bombardier's scope on an A6 attack plane—"this little piece of plastic," Lehman said—for which Grumman was charging \$1,800. The somewhat unusual screwdriver is down to \$45, he said, and the "piece of cardboard" to \$60.

Questioned about recent CIA estimates that Soviet defense spending held steady between 1976 and 1982, Weinberger said the United States nonetheless cannot relax its efforts to increase its military strength.

"The fact that there is an enormously large amount of money being spent by the Soviets for their military machine each year is not disputed and . . . the fact that it's a great deal more than we're investing is not disputed," he said. "We don't think we are in a situation where we can in any sense slow down the regaining of our military strength."

Weinberger noted with satisfaction that Congress has funded every weapons system requested by Reagan except nerve gas.

But he said stretching out the procurement time and, in particular, refusing to approve multiyear contracts will increase the ultimate cost of the buildup by hundreds of millions of dollars.